DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 034 662 RE 002 323

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TITLE Words Make for Success.
PUB DATE 2 May 69
NOTE 9p.; Paper presented at the International Reading Association conference, Kansas City, Mo., April 30-May 3, 1969

EDRS PRICE EDRS Price MF-$0.25 HC-$0.55
DESCRIPTORS Etymology, *Language Role, Mass Media, *Vocabulary, *Vocabulary Development, Vocabulary Skills

ABSTRACT

Because of the increasing demands that today's society places on language, there is an increasing need for vocabulary building. The opening of new fields, industries, and media and the vocabularies of specialized fields have all contributed to making increased word knowledge a necessity. New words have been coined to describe developments in new industries such as space exploration and computer science, and new concepts have required new words. Therefore, today's students must have large vocabularies. Instructors can make the acquisition of a large vocabulary challenging for the student by developing interest in the origin and development of words. Although Marshall McLuhan has prophesied a universe dominated by media without content, the author contends that one still needs a well developed vocabulary to succeed in today's society. (WB)

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Vocabulary Building
Sessions -
Friday, May 2, 1969
2:15 - 3:15 p.m.

WORDS MAKE FOR SUCCESS

Words do make for success.

There is a strong correlation between vocabulary and socio-economic status attained.

Miles Standish sent John Alden to court Priscilla because, he said, "I'm a maker of wars and not a maker of phrases." He lost her, and we, too, can miss out in life if we don't speak, write, listen and read for ourselves.

Each person must work to improve his vocabulary -- no one can do it for him.

A. <u>The language explosion</u>

Our language keeps growing. There is an explosion of new words each time a new field or industry opens up. Brand new words are coined, and old words move into the everyday vocabulary of everyone who wishes to keep up with developments. Radio and television have coined thousands of new words. Even the hippies have a language of their own. They have contributed many new words and given new meanings to words already in our working vocabularies.

It is estimated that a vocabulary of 50,000 words is necessary to fully understand the contents of an issue of the New York Times.

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Shelley in his poetry used only 16,000 different words.

In Paradise Lost Milton used 11,000.

Homer used 9,000 in The Illiad and The Odessey.

There are only 6,000 different words in the King James version of the Bible.

But there are at least 650,000 words in a large unabridged dictionary. Our everyday lives are touches and affected by so many new and complicated things that our abilities to cope with the challenges of life are tested every day. Words are the tools of thought. As we enlarge our vocabularies we expand the areas of understanding, and we open up the field of opportunities. A study made at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology demonstrated that graduates with the largest vocabularies in the top 15 percent turned out to be top executives, while those in the lowest 10 percent with poor vocabularies never attained executive positions. It is a well established fact that the vocabulary test is the best available measure of general intelligence.

B. <u>Instructors can make vocabulary building exciting</u>

Some people have a natural curiosity about words, but oftener than otherwise the instructor has to arouse such a curiosity. The building of a large vocabulary can be an interesting, and even exciting, undertaking. Instructors should expose students to the background of words -- where they came from and how they developed. Take a word like "honeymoon" and explain that many years ago when young people married they followed a custom of heating honey for a "full moon" or thirty days. Hence the period following marriage came to be known as the "honeymoon".

Give them the coinage of "tantalize". In Greek mythology King Tantalus offended the gods and was punished in an unusual manner. He was placed in a river whose waters reached to his chin. Whenever he attempted to take a drink the waters receded. Fruit which hung over his head moved out of reach when he tried to satisfy his hunger. Tantalus became the symbol of teasing, which means

to keep something desirable in view but out of reach. From "Tantalus" we got the word "tantalize".

It is interesting to learn that the word "curfew" comes to us from a custom or regulation in the Middle Ages requiring that at a fixed hour in the evening fires should be covered or extinguished.

During the reign of Louis XIV the word "etiquette" meant "keep off the grass". His gardener placed signs, or "etiquettes" to warm people, and when they were disobeyed the King made rules to be followed. The word today means forms required by good breeding, social conventions, or prescribed by authority, to be observed in social or official life.

The word "trivia" has an interesting background. In Roman days when women carried water in jugs from the well their paths would cross and they would stop and chat about light and small matters. "Tri - via" was a Latin phrase meaning "three roads", so today we have the word "trivia", meaning trifles, unimportant matters.

The word "desultory" goes back to Roman times and stems from the "sult" or "sault" family of words, meaning to leap or jump from one horse to another. So, if you insult someone, figuratively you are "jumping on him". A "desultory" conversation is one that jumps aimlessly from one topic to another. A "salient" feature is one that leaps out at you. An "assault" is an attack or a leaping at you. And there are other words: assaulter, assailant, etc. It is interesting to learn that such words as "desultory", "salient" and "assailant" have a common root. It is fascinating to learn that when you speak of a salient point, and when you use the military term "salient" -- an outwardly projecting part of a trench system -- the idea of "leaping" is common to both. In one instance points are leaping at you; in the other you speak of a "leaping" or "jumping" off place.

The building of a vocabulary can become a truly fascinating experience. Woodrow Wilson, university president and President of the United States, had an insatiable thirst for the derivations and origins of words. He said that his interest in words came from the stress his father put on table talk. The Wilson family never had a meal without chewing and digesting words with the food. They talked about words, made jokes about words, and had fun in the process.

The building of vocabularies should not be relegated exclusively to special courses. Every instructor, no matter what subject he teaches, should occasionally take a word apart, examine its origin and roots and its evolution. Whenever possible he should point out interesting, unusual or humorous aspects. He might be rewarded by closer attention from his students, and he might , also, convince a few that etymology is a Wonderful World of Words. It might be interesting to point out relationships which some words have for other familiar words. Kinships in the field of words can be almost as unexpected and astounding as kinships discovered while pursuing the field of genealogy.

C. Vocabularies in specialized fields

Language explosions in the rapidly developing fields of television, radio, electronics, space travel and exploration, and in the expanding fields of medicine, law, politics, government, etc., account for most of the new words and new meanings with which we are being bombarded. If we would keep up with what is developing around us in these fields, at least in a general way, we should bring into our working vocabularies some of the specialized jargon. As Mario Pei, in his book Language of the Specialists, points out, words in specialized fields have a way of coming at the layman from all sides, on radio and television, the daily newspaper, magazines, and even in ordinary conversation. He abstracts from twenty specialized fields terms that a generally educated person might be expected to understand. We should know that in an orbit around the earth the "apogee" is the point at which the satellite is farthest from

earth, and that the "perigee" is the point nearest to earth; that "G" represents an acceleration equal to the acceleration of gravity and that it is a measurement of stress; that "garbage" when used in this field means miscellaneous objects in orbit, usually materials ejected by or broken away from space vehicles; that a "drogue parachute" is a drag parachute; and even that a "launch window" is not part of a space ship but is an interval of time during which a rocket can be launched to accomplish a particular purpose. Similarly, a "re-entry window" is the area at the limits of the earth's atmosphere through which a spacecraft can pass to accomplish a successful re-entry xxxxxx or splash down. In this field "umbilical cord" is a service line for electricity or fluids between the ground and an upright rocket missile before launch, and "zero G" is another name for weightlessness.

In the field of computers we should understand that the general term "data processing" is used to describe all computer operations on data fed into the computer; that here "garbage" means undecipherable or meaningless information produced or included in a computer output; that a "key punch" is a typewriter machine that punches holes representing data in cards; and that "memory" is the internal storage capacity of a computer.

If we should wish to follow a rather recent development in the securities, business and corporate fields we should know that the word "conglomerate" means a company or corporation that has grown by acquiring a number of different businesses. It is quite surprising to find how few people understand that a "bullish" stock market is a rising market, and that a "bearish" stock market is just the opposite.

"Caveat" is a Latin word meaning, literally, "let him beware". It is used to mean a caution, warning, or admonition. It is used in the field of law to refer to a formal notice or warning, and sometimes is coupled with other words,

as in "caveat emptor" which means "let the buyer beware" or, in other words "he buys at his own risk". The business vocabulary has adopted many legal terms, but it has borrowed from other vocabularies. For instance, the gambling word "hedging" meaning "offsetting one risk with another" is quite commonly used in the field of business. Business has even gone into the kitchen to get the term "frozen assets" meaning assets that cannot quickly be converted into cash.

The student who expects to specialize in a particular field such as medicine or law would profit by taking a vocabulary building course such as the one given in the University of Utah Medical School. While designed primarily as a training program for Medical Assistants, many pre-medical students, and even laymen have found the course fascinating and profitable. Instead of stressing etymological subtleties and Greek and Latin derivations, emphasis is laid on the meaning of word roots and combining forms. This approach facilitates the acquisition and retention of knowledge. Some medical terms are bilingual in their derivation, as, for example, "teleradiography" which combines the Greek prefix "tele" meaning "distant" with the Latin root "radiu" meaning "ray", and the Greek root "Graphein" meaning to write. Some medical terms, such as "cranium", "thorax" and "pharynx" were as familiar to Hippocrates nearly 2500 years ago as they are to doctors today. On the other hand, such words as "antibiotics" and "penicillin" are new terms that have been coined in recent times. New medical terms are constantly being coined as new discoveries are made.

D. <u>Why are new words coined</u>

New words are being coined to describe developments in expanding and in recently opened fields. Entirely new vistas are coming into view. Concepts that have never been dreamed of before are now being put into practice. Because existing words are inadequate, new ones are coined to tell the world about new

concepts, new machinery, processes and ideas. Sometimes the newly coined word represents sort of a shorthand way of expressing a complicated and involved concept. It is needed to avoid the need for repeating long and involved descriptions. It becomes a true working tool within the particular field and often finds its way into the vocabulary of everyday conversation.

The way in which the word "software" came into the vocabulary of computers is cited by Pei as an illustration of how new words are created. In the development of the computer it became necessary to develop a language for rapidly translating human endeavor into a recognizable form for both humans and machines. Some anonymous electronic computer manufacturer, programmer, or user used the word "software" to designate that language, and the word was finally defined as "anything and everything related to an electronic computer that is not present in hardware, which is considered the actual equipment and machines." Consequently, "software" was adopted as the converse of "hardware" and became a rather elastic term. It will not be long before "software" will become a quite commonly used word.

Some words are formed by adding or combining forms which are derived from Greek and Latin to common English words. Multipath is an example. Acronyms and word fusion are two other important modes, and in "radar" (radio detection and ranging) and "laser" (light amplification by stimulated emission of radiation).

E. McLuhan's theory

In his book, "What's in a Word", Mario Pei discusses the much-talked-about theory of Marshall McLuhan, Professor of English at the University of Toronto. The author writes:

> "McLuhan's theory in a nutshell is this: Our new media (movies, Telstar, flight, etc.) supply us with a mass of information that far transcends anything known before. This information can no longer be absorbed, digested and assimilated on a linear basis (that is, by the

> traditional 'learning' process). It must be sensed and grasped all at once. What you miss, you miss. What you misinterpret stays misinterpreted. There is no time for study, no leisure for introspection. The learning of the future comes through the senses and bypasses the conscious brain."

Pei concludes that while, unfortunately, a good deal of this is true, McLuhan's prophecy of a universe dominated by media without content, it still an unwarranted assumption. "There is widespread revolt right now against films of violence and sex, against tasteless, graceless, greedy commercials on radio and T.V., against what goes on in some highly publicized circles under the name of modern literature, modern art, modern music. By and large, man is still a thinking, rational, critical animal, and wants to remain one."

Words still make for success. Words are the foundation for success, and the result of success. The ability to understand and use words correctly enables one to think clearly and communicate with others. In the field of intellectual endeavors familiarity with words and the ability to express your thoughts is evidence of real success.

Nothing needs saving more urgently than the purity of language. The propagandists have long known of the power of words. They have been trying to steal the finest and dearest words that free society has inherited, in order to subvert them to the purposes of tyranny. The word "peace" is a good example. "Democracy" is used lavishly by those who would destroy it.

President Nixon in giving a eulogy a few days before President Eisenhower was buried said: "To President Eisenhower the words "Freedom" and "Democracy" were not cliches, but living truths."

Make words live for you. They will brighten your life, and help you attain success. Teachers should remember that enthusiasm not only creates immediate student interest, but stimulates future learning.

The growing interest in the psychology of communication is a sign of the times. If we are to have peace among nations, and among peoples of the earth, we must learn to better communicate with one another. As someone has said: "When words fail, wars begin."

Don't follow the pattern of Miles Standish, but be a winner and a success by making words work for you and help to get in life what you are after.

I hope this is not a John Alden paper, but one that speaks for itself.